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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5272
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2978
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4563
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2288
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3482
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000320

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOIST-LED GOVERNMENT THREATENING TO REMOVE
ARMY CHIEF

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

11. (C) Nepal's Maoist Prime Minister Pushpa Dahal asked Chief of Army Staff Rookmangud Katawal to step down on April 19. The PM cited three issues: Nepal Army (NA) recruitment, the brigadier generals' continued reporting to duty after their forced retirement and the NA's withdrawal from the National Games. Katawal refused to resign. The cabinet may remove him April 20. Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood told the Prime Minister at a meeting early on April 20 that India supported civilian control of the Army but that dismissing Katawal at this time ran the risk of getting Nepal off track and was not the way to earn respect for civilian control.

PM Asks Army Chief to Step Down

12. (C) Maoist Prime Minister Pushpa Dahal met April 19 with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Rookmangud Katawal and asked him to step down. The PM reportedly cited three reasons. First, the Nepal Army (NA) had proceeded in late 2008 with recruitment of additional soldiers in spite of clear indications from Maoist Defense Minister Ram Thapa to cease and desist. Second, the COAS permitted eight brigadier generals to continue to report to duty after the Minister of Defense chose not to extend their terms and facilitated their filing of a lawsuit in the Supreme Court against their forced retirement. Third, the COAS directed the Nepal Army to withdraw from those events in the recent National Games in Kathmandu in which the Maoist People's Liberation Army team participated. Reportedly, the Chief was offered the possibility of an ambassadorship or other suitable senior position if he agreed to resign. He refused.

Cabinet Engagement

13. (C) The PM's Personal Secretary confirmed to Emboff April 20 that the cabinet met at 5 p.m. on April 19. The cabinet approved a three-point questionnaire which asks the Chief for a response to each of the issues the PM raised with the Chief earlier in the day. (Note: Post is emailing a translation of the questionnaire to the Nepal desk.) The cabinet gave the Chief 24 hours to respond. At close of business on April 20,

the cabinet did not appear yet to have met to make a final decision about whether or not to remove the Chief. Indian Ambassador Rakesh Sood told the Ambassador the afternoon of April 20 that the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist, which is second-largest party in the governing coalition, was starting to have cold feet about the Maoist plan to remove Katawal. Sood said he had told Katawal to "calm down," and cite legal arguments in answering the first two questions. Both the issue of recruitment and the retirement of the brigadiers are pending before the Supreme Court.

Indian Ambassador Raises Concerns with PM

14. (C) Ambassador Sood informed the Ambassador that he had discussed the issue of Katawal's removal in a meeting with PM Dahal early on April 20. Sood said he had reiterated India's support for civilian control of the NA, but that he had alerted the PM that Katawal's removal at this time threatened to lead the peace process and Nepal "in a direction in which you do not want to be led." The PM explained that the NA's withdrawal from the Games had been the "last straw." Sood said that taking this step now was not the way for the Maoist-led government to earn respect from the Army for civilian control.

Possibility of a "Bangladesh Solution"

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15. (C) The Indian Ambassador added to the Ambassador that in his recent discussions with former Prime Minister and leader of the opposition G.P. Koirala, Koirala had spoken about a "Bangladesh solution" (i.e., a military takeover) to the continued standoffs between the Maoists and the Nepal Army. But Sood assessed that at the end of the day, Koirala and his Nepali Congress Party were likely to object vociferously to the dismissal of Katawal but not attempt to use the removal to spark any more widespread political movement against the government.

U.S. Position

16. (C) If required to comment, post plans to use the points developed in response to the Government of Nepal (GON) decision not to extend the brigadiers: i.e., while recognizing civilian control over the armed forces, we urge GON leaders to exercise that responsibility wisely, particularly considering the impact decisions like this one can have on the peace process. Non-participation in National Games does not rise to the level of threatening progress on key issues.

Comment

17. (C) In the event that the cabinet decides to remove Katawal as head of the Army, post's assessment is that the Nepal Army's officer corps will not rise up to prevent his removal. Our concern, however, is that his removal at this time will poison the atmosphere among the parties in the Constituent Assembly, impede progress on integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants and make an already difficult political environment even more complicated.
POWELL